

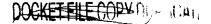
Organizations Concerned about Rural Education

901 Monroe Street N., #1507 Arlington, VA 22201 703-469-1443 cconrad37@comcast.net

## Member Organizations

American Association of School Administrators American Association of State Colleges and Universities American Library Association Communicating for Agriculture **Forest Counties School Coalition** Lightspan, Inc. M W Financial, Inc. National Association of Counties National Association of Elementary School Principals National Association of Federally Impacted schools National Association of Secondary School Principals National Education Association National Education Knowledge Industry Association National Farmers Union National Grange National Indian School Boards Association National Rural Education Association National Rural Electric Cooperative Association National School Boards Association North Country Education Foundation of New Hampshire Rebuild America's Schools Rural School and Community Trust Rural Telephone Finance Cooperative SBC Telecommunications, Inc. US West Communications Verizon

## EX PARTE OR LATE FILED



February 6, 2003

## ORIGINAL RECEIVED

Ms. Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary Federal Communications Commission 445 Twelfth Street, SW Washington, DC 20554

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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

Re: Ex Parte Comments. In the Matter of CC Docket No. 01-338, Review of the Section 251 Unbundling Obligations of Incumbent Local Exchange Carriers; CC Docket No 96-98, Implementation of the Local Competition Provisions of the Telecommunications Act of 996; and CC Docket No 98-147, Deployment of Wireline Services Offering Advanced Telecommunications Capability.

## Dear Secretary Dortch:

Organizations Concerned about Rural Education (OCRE) represents the interest of educators, students and learning institutions in rural communities throughout the United States. We remain steadfast in our commitment to ensure students in rural America have access to modem schools, quality teachers and first class resources. For this reason, we want to re-emphasize our view that learning and teaching in the 21<sup>st</sup> century also requires access to the Internet and to other advanced technologies.

OCRE has repeatedly urged the Commission to eliminate barriers to broadband deployment and increased competition in the long distance market. Telecommunications services must be available and affordable to rural schools and homes just as they are available to their urban and suburban counterparts. Yet, rural America is still neglected by many of the nation's telecommunications providers who opt to offer their services to business customers and high volume customers. Consequently, rural students, teachers and educational institutions have fewer choices and are at risk of being denied access to advanced services and technologies.

We believe that this unacceptable situation is compounded by the unbundled network elements platform (UNE-P) rules that you are currently reviewing. By requiring incumbent telephone companies to lease their networks to competitors at below wholesale rates, the FCC has unintentionally created an environment where competitors have no incentive *to* build their own facilities. Another unintended consequence is that the incumbent telephone providers are reluctant to invest in the networks or build them out for fear they will have to provide them to competitors at artificially low rates. From a pure business standpoint, we can't blame them.

And yet, we see that UNE-P rules do not apply to wireless and cable providers and they have succeeded in building competing facilities. As a result, OCRE would like to see the incumbent telephone providers unleashed from rules that are outdated and which act as an obstacle to growth. We believe this will greatly enhance the competitive environment in rural America and provide our members with more services, more options and ultimately a better educational environment.

OCRE urges the FCC to eliminate the UNE-P rules and to pay particular attention to rural America during subsequent reviews to ensure that the changes have the desired outcome.

Sincerely,

Dale Lestina President